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SOMALIA ON THE HORN

A Counterpoint of Problems Confronting One of Africa's New Nations

by E. A. Bayne

Part IV: The Ethiopians

An Ethiopian warrior.

March 11, 1960

"This country," said an American official a few weeks ago in Addis Ababa, "is run like an ante-bellum plantation, and there is no doubt in anyone's mind who is 'ole Massa!'"

The more I listened to Ethiopians, Americans, Germans, and Britons in the cool, high capital of the King of Kings, and watched the populace willingly bow to the ground as he passed, the more I wondered whether it might not be more precise to find a likeness to early Bourbon France in this country, where power is centralized in a delicately balanced court, the provinces are bereft of talent and means, and there is even an incipient (if ineffectual) Fronde.

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On one score there is unanimity of opinion in Addis Ababa concerning His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie: he is unequivocally, indisputably the boss. The stories about him, as he stands exposed and monolithic, are legion. Since the press is feeble in a country with 90 per cent illiteracy--and is a controlled press at that--few of the stories are more than the substance of an oral myth. But there is basis for thought. It seems to be true that he will shortly have a new golden state coach, made in France at a cost of $50,000, in which he will ride to open his Parliament. It will provide more dignity than a Rolls Royce, presumably! And it is true that frequently the state highway budget is badly cramped because the Emperor, in a stately procession through the countryside, has ordered the building of too many churches in spontaneous exhibition of personal largess with a consequent diversion of funds. And it seems to be true that when Kwame Nkrumah, the Prime Minister of Ghana, came on a state visit to Addis Ababa and asked what the city offered in night life, the Emperor had a night club organized in a matter of hours, complete with Egyptian dancing girls! And reportedly he did see and help the ten-year-old boy from a distant village who stood before the tall, erect guardsman at his palace gate and demanded to see the Emperor.

"The Emperor is too busy a man to see a small boy," the guard said.

"But my grandfather told me that the Emperor would always see anyone who needed help," the boy protested.

"He can't be seeing everybody, boy," the guard remarked, and attempted to turn the boy away. "Go home."

"But I have no home now. My father died. But my grandfather told me that the Emperor Menelik would help me."

At this the guard relented for the Emperor Menelik had been dead since 1913, and this was 1959!

The Emperor Menelik left other heritages. It was he, by routing the Italian invaders in 1896, who probably first brought Ethiopia to modern European notice as a nation of differing character from the rest of Africa. And it was he who in 1908 signed a treaty with the Italians that set the present boundary between Somalia and Ethiopia, the line on which the present Emperor resolutely stands. Somalia has offered historical and legal arguments for the inclusion of the Ogaden (or Harar Province of Ethiopia) with its 600,000 Somalis, within the framework of a Greater Somalia, but Haile Selassie refuses even to negotiate on this area.

* * * * *

"We have no quarrel with Somalia," said the Ethiopian Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs to me. "When Abdullahi Issa [Somalia's Prime Minister]

came here, we gave him the honors of a chief of state. Even your Vice President Nixon had no more of a reception. His Imperial Majesty has been consistently in favor of Somalia. We were one of the first to endorse its independence in the United Nations ten years ago, and we voted for the end of the Trusteeship last December."

"But you were not ready to arbitrate the border problem, were you?" I asked.

"We told the Somalis and Mr. Trygve Lie [who had been appointed by the United Nations to act as arbitrator in the dispute] that we had nothing to arbitrate. The border of 1908 has been the traditional border--indeed, without this border there would be no Somalia legally, you see." And he smiled as a diplomat should. "Of course, we have offered Somalia federation with us. We recognize that tribal loyalties are the more important element of citizenship for the Somalis."

"You did negotiate with the British over special rights for Somalis in the Ogaden, I believe. Does this not have some relevance for the Somalis?" I used the word "negotiate" advisedly. Actually, the meeting might better have been described as a peace parley. The British had ostentatiously moved troops to Aden in 1954 when this took place, and Ethiopia had armed its border police in response.

"Ah, this was simply a continuation of an arrangement that had grown out of the war," he replied mildly. "It involves no change in territory and it cannot. You cannot expect Ethiopia to give up territory that has been hers for centuries. Somalia itself has been a part of Ethiopia, you know."

"Does that mean that Ethiopia has doubts about Somalia's independence?"

"Not at all. We are in favor of Somalia independence and we will respect it in the future just as we have in the United Nations already."

"Would you go so far as to say that Ethiopia will help Somalia. It is a poor country, as you know, and it will require help from outside countries."

"I think we would be willing to contribute aid to Somalia, on a token basis. Yes, on a token basis," he said, emphasizing the qualifying word. "This is part of our hope to be closer to all these new African nations. However, we are a peaceful people and we cannot endorse bloodshed. Perhaps because we are the oldest independent country, we have a closer relationship with Liberia, which is not a new nation in Africa."

The statement is understandable in these terms: the Nkrumahs, Mboyas, and Tourés of Africa speak eloquently of civil rights, of labor organization,

and economic democracy and represent a detribalized and persistent force for sociological change. The Emperor of Ethiopia, and to a lesser extent the Americo-Liberian gentry of the West African republic, represent not the wave of the future but a durable medievalism in many ways. The blandness of the Acting Foreign Minister's comments about Somalia did not belie the rigidity with which Ethiopia views the boundary question. The Emperor did not reassume his power after the British liberation of his country from the Italians in 1941 in order, in the Churchillian idiom, to preside over its dissolution.

When I asked the Minister whether Ethiopia's sudden new ties with the Soviet Union might have been related to the Emperor's search for support against British and Somali attempts to solve the territorial problem, he was equally bland, and virtually read to me from the book of proper international decorum.

"Not at all," he said. "Our arrangement with Russia is purely economic, a loan for development [about $100 million] on reasonable terms which we greatly need for we are an underdeveloped country. Fundamentally, we remain true to our pro-Western position and to the United Nations. But we are not such fools as to refuse badly needed aid, and neither are we foolish enough to permit the Russians to interfere in our affairs. It is not always easy to prevent this, I think."

But I was to have a succinct statement of the chronology of this sudden affaire de coeur between the Emperor of Ethiopia (about as improbable a pro-Communist as can be imagined) and the Russians from an American observer in Addis Ababa whose sources must be considered impeccable.

"Certainly," he said, "the Emperor needed the money. The price of coffee is down, the Government is dependent upon the revenue from coffee exports. Moreover, the balance of payments was in serious deficit--but economics is not the main reason at all."

[Actually, to meet the costs of a reasonable program of development, and the maintenance of the Ethiopian army of about 28,000 men, the United States has put more than $104 million into Ethiopia, and Britain, Germany, Yugoslavia, Italy, Czechoslovakia, and the United Nations all contribute varying amounts of technical, loan, and grant assistance. Ethiopia has been on the receiving end of developmental assistance for years. One of the first technical aid missions the United States inaugurated in the Eastern Hemisphere was in Ethiopia in 1944. The country has not been forgotten in the era of international aid, and the United States has been the major contributor until the present Russian démarche. In addition, the image of the United States as a major influence has grown in proportion. My friend's chronology would not omit the role of the United States.]

"The political explanation has a history," he continued. "It begins in

1944 with the formal takeover of Ethiopia from the British military. They gave all of Ethiopia back--except the Ogaden where the Somalis graze their livestock and live. The British had tried this maneuver even before, and suggested that the whole Horn of Africa be made a part of the Commonwealth, you know. Then in 1946, Bevin suggested that the Emperor divest himself of the Ogaden, and Lord De La Warr was sent here to negotiate again, but the Emperor would have none of it. Then in 1954, after both sides paraded soldiers in the region over the difficulties in the Ogaden, the present treaty was signed. Maybe neither side is playing it fairly, but what can the Emperor do?"

[Only a month or so earlier there had been a number of people killed in the Ogaden, which resulted in a bitter exchange of notes between the British and the Ethiopians. Some Somali sub-clan chiefs had journeyed to Addis Ababa to protest the action, but most observers seemed to feel that they had been properly rewarded by the Emperor for turning "state's evidence" against their own Somali brethren, and were suspect.]

H.I.M. Haile Selassie.

"Then came the speech of Lennox-Boyd. [See Appendix III.] The first step toward a Greater Somalia. But there is a sub-plot in this saga. About a month before the speech was to be given, the British delivered a copy of it to the Ethiopian Foreign Office, I suppose as a matter of courtesy. A day or so afterward, on instructions from Washington, the American Ambassador called also to say that the United States had talked the Colonial Secretary's proposed speech over with the British and thought it a good idea. 'What did the Emperor think about it?'

"Well, the Emperor must have just about exploded! But the Ethiopians didn't say anything for several weeks, in fact nearly a month. Then they sent for the American Ambassador at ten o'clock in the evening of February 7th (the Lennox-Boyd speech was being given on the 9th) and charged the United States with having associated itself with Britain in an unfriendly declaration, and further demanded that the United States prevent the giving of the speech. Of course, it was too late. Lennox-Boyd was already somewhere in the bush of British Somaliland. It was too late even if the United States had wanted to have the statement modified and the British had been agreeable, which I doubt that they would be."

[An Embassy official later admitted the truth of the story, and reported that the Ambassador had felt constrained to issue a statement the next day "that nothing had been said to threaten the integrity of Ethiopia."]

"After the American Ambassador tried to cover our deliberate association with the British, the relations between the United States and the Emperor deteriorated. Not seriously, of course, but the Court made it pretty clear that America was no longer the honored guest," he said, and then went on to the denouement:

"It wasn't long after all this business that the Emperor dusted off a four- or five-year-old invitation to Moscow and off he went. The Russians were not so surprised that they didn't have a welcome present for him and $100 million was a good figure. Mind you," he pointed out, "I don't say that one followed the other, but what other conclusion can you reach?"

In any event, Russia had arrived in the Horn of Africa with a considerable splash that tended to negate the months of arduous politicking a decade ago when the Western Council of Ministers prevented the Russians from becoming the trusteeship power for some or any of the former Italian colonies. Libya had gotten its independence, Ethiopia had been given Eritrea, and the Italians themselves were given the task of bringing Somalia to statehood--Russia had lost that gambit only to win a new position of prominence ten years later. Whether America had lost anything, other than having a rival in Ethiopia that had not been so intimately there before, remained to be seen; but for Somalia, the lengths to which the Ethiopian intransigence on Greater Somalia would go became dramatically evident.

"On this issue," an American diplomat told me, "there is no compromise with the Emperor. We are with him or against him."

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It is not by accident that H.I.M. Haile Selassie is styled an emperor, for Ethiopia is not so much a nation as a group of races being ruled through a combination of tradition and force by a dominant people, the Amharas, or Abyssinians. These are Coptic Christians, mountain people, with long lines of clear history back to the original Hamites of the Near East, and whose kings in legend, at least, have carried the line from a fortuitous union between King Solomon of the Hebrews and the Queen of Sheba three thousand years ago.[1] While these Christian, Amharic-speaking people are probably no more than 35 per cent of the population of Ethiopia today, they rule a country composed of five other races, chiefly Muslim, but including a fair proportion of pagans. The most numerous of these other peoples are the Gallas, in whose

[1] See Margery Perham's, The Government of Ethiopia, London, 1948, p. 438, for a full statement of the legend in which Solomon quite cheerfully tricked the willing queen into his bed.

territory the capital, Addis Ababa, had been strategically placed after the last (19th century) war of conquest, and the emergence of the present general shape of the empire. The Court of the Emperor, in which all power is concentrated, is an arena where the conflicting special interests of what might become separatist regions are kept in balance or neutralized by the favors and influence of the King of Kings. While Ethiopia presents a semblance of unity to the outside world (it can, for example, point to its parliament), the shifts of regional governors as they gain or lose favor in the court, can be an index to the true state of domestic politics.

The fact that this nation, which is in reality a confederation of peoples predominantly primitive ruled by a generally hereditary elite, has survived the Italian conquest of 1935, conquest by the British six years later, and the revolutionary influences of modern technology is remarkable. It is, perhaps, more a tribute to the statecraft of the Emperor himself, than to the medieval institution over which he presides. Those close to the Emperor do not entertain illusions that Haile Selassie is deeply convinced of the divine right of kings, but rather characterize him as a shrewd manipulator of people and power. Perhaps, and more classically, he is the not overly benign tyrant of Platonic state wherein there are only two classes: the magistrates and warriors; and the slaves in this case tied to the soil.

But this image only serves to reinforce the logical necessity of his attitude toward the Somali question. A king, like a president, cannot afford to lose many important political battles. In the peculiar situation in which

Abyssinians are a hardy mountain people.

Ethiopia has found itself for centuries (a Christian island surrounded by Islam, a fact of political geography obscured for some time by the various hegemonies of the Europeans who are now retiring from the field), the cession of the Ogaden to Somalia and the loss of this race to the Empire on separatist grounds could be only the first act of a drama of disintegration. There seem to be a number of factors in support of this fear.

First, the Emperor himself is nearing seventy years of age. There is a crown prince, who in recent years has been more publicly groomed for the succession but is said to be under the handicaps of not having the confidence of the Emperor himself, and of being subject to the rivalry of others who share the Solomonic line of Lions of Judah. Sociologically, Ethiopia is still quite primitively structured. There is virtually no native middle class, and the functions of a middle class have been performed by foreigners (to a large extent Italians who have accommodated themselves to an independent Ethiopia).[2] This lack of a middle class on which a multiracial and pragmatic loyalty to the whole state might be based is a national weakness in the face of separatist tendencies, religious difference within the state, and political opportunism among the Amharas themselves. The roots of the Emperor's caution and intransigence lie deep in a sense of survival, or at least, in a desire to preserve the monarchy.

Ethiopia is not, however, entirely motionless socially or economically. The devoted work of countless European and latterly American advisers, who have been a part of the Ethiopian scene since the late 19th century--counselling and even leading its armies, administering its national bank, directing its economic planning, commanding its police, teaching in its schools and colleges, providing its medical services--has not been without result, even though few advisers admit more psychic compensation than frustration when they finished their tours. Most of the doctors still are Italians; there are teachers from England, Germany, the United States; the Yugoslavs are prospecting for offshore oil on the Eritrean coast; American military advisers are teaching Ethiopians how to use nearly fifty million dollars worth of hardware, including jet airplanes,[3] and agricultural, public health and land reclamation technicians are helping to build Ethiopian institutions. Trans-World Airlines operates, presumably on a teaching basis, the Ethiopian Air Line (which maintains a monopoly on travel in the country). The Scandinavians are spotted here and there, particularly in training the police. This multicultural approach to

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[2] The recognition of the country's requirements for a business class, including such artisans as plumbers, mechanics, and similar skilled labor was reflected in the fact, and the remark of the Acting Prime Minister to me a fortnight ago: "We needed the Italians," he said, as he described the somewhat mild treatment of them by Ethiopia after the war was over, even though the conquest of Ethiopia and its occupation was historically brutal and corrupting. There is some truth in the statement of an Italian diplomat in Addis Ababa who said: "There was nothing here before we came!"

Ethiopia is notable, but it is common to all that the concept of teaching and transference of techniques is not easily established among the educated Ethiopians to whom, traditionally, work of any kind has been the task of subservient people. The tourist is not impressed in Addis Ababa with the politesse of minor officials (at least not this tourist!) who seem bent upon impressing the visitor with pomposity rather than with efficiency. Ethiopians are a proud people, but this must be narrowed to mean the Amharas who constitute the ruling caste, and who, in history, have earned their superiority in this corner of Africa by a masterful use of arms and diplomacy. They are differentiated by altitude, by language, by purer Hamitic characteristics, and religion.[4] (Coptic Christians, like the ancient Hebrews, find no moral issue in slavery. Thus, their religion not only sets the Amharas apart but it also fortifies them in their leadership role.)

While economic progress, over the last three decades at least, can be demonstrated (based to a large extent upon the roads, factories, and other infrastructure initiated under the Italians) Ethiopia is still undeveloped. It subsists chiefly upon the export of coffee, but since its coffee represents only about two per cent of the world's supply, it is vulnerable to the fluctuations in world prices. Coffee which was selling at Eth$49 in 1954 sells at Eth$29 today (for 17 kgms), and coffee still represents about 50 per cent of the value of Ethiopian exports, the remainder being a miscellany of agricultural products such as hides, oil seeds, and cereals. Its major customers at present are the United States, Italy, Germany and the United Kingdom, and its total exports are valued at less than $18 million in normal years. It runs an import surplus of as much as 25 per cent, made up by loans and grants from the outside world, of which a significant proportion in recent years has come from the

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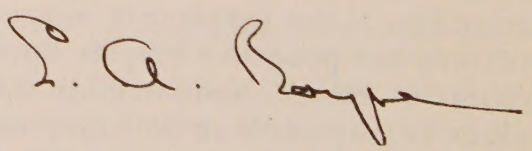
[3] Ethiopia receives jet planes despite the candid comment of a visiting American congressman who remarked: "Ethiopia needs jets like a hog needs a sidesaddle!" Twelve F86 jets are budgetted for this year, but the military aid program should be viewed realistically as a commercial arrangement between the United States and Ethiopia. The American Army Signal Corps refurbished a previous Italian radio communications base near Asmara, in Eritrea, which now provides our major military link with posts in the Far East and elsewhere in the Eastern Hemisphere. When Eritrea became Ethiopian in 1950, it was necessary to provide some quid pro quo for the use of the base on Ethiopian soil, particularly since it would be regarded as an appropriate, if not extremely important, military target in event of war. The military aid program may be thus looked upon as part of a rental payment subject to annual, and possibly inflationary, renegotiation. What collateral values it may have as political support for the Emperor's regime internally, or in adding to the strength of the free world's military posture in the light of local history, are perhaps less easily explicable.

[4] The Tigré people, numbering less than a million, are also Coptic Christians but are subject to the Amharas, culturally and politically.

Communist bloc. Imports from the bloc will probably exceed $2 million in 1959, but Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany constitute Ethiopia's major suppliers. The foreign trade picture remains that of an underdeveloped country, although an increasing proportion of imports, heavily for the account of foreign investors, is for developmental machinery.

When the economic picture is summarized, notably for the post World War II period, there is an inescapable conclusion that Ethiopia is beginning the arduous process of development and that the continuing assistance from the United States, the International Bank and other Western agencies, plus the now major assistance from the Communist bloc will create that inexorable momentum that will modify the present sociological structure, and ultimately the political basis on which the country is presently operated. Assuming (which may be an increasingly unsupportable assumption in time) that the ways of freedom and liberal democracy will themselves become the morality of the state, based upon an increasingly prospering middle class that is just beginning to develop, the issue of Somalia could fade into a regional democratic solution that would include the whole Horn of Africa. This is, admittedly, a vision of federated democracy--one, perhaps, that the now plentiful nations of Africa must begin to study if they are to survive with traditions of freedom in a modern world.

At this moment in history, however, Ethiopia's monolithic emperor can but view the threatened rise of a unified Somalia with alarm; it is a threat to his empire's survival in its traditional form; and it is not for him to weigh the need for a recognition of Somali independence--outside the empire. Within it, perhaps, the restlessness of the Somali element has been noticed. The Emperor has been devoting some of the American aid received to a well-drilling program that will improve pasturage in the Ogaden, and a German assistance program of a million dollars worth of prefabricated housing for clinics and new government buildings in the same area is a gesture, at least, that his Somalis have not been forgotten. But beside the massive plans for a new capital city that might be built near Lake Tana in the country's interior, or the major expenditure of American aid for military equipment, the Somali program in the Ogaden is marginal and insignificant. What emerges from this is Ethiopian rigidity on the Somali problem--rigidity that viewed from Mogadiscio, Somalia's capital, can be explosive.



[Photos: National Photo Studio, Addis Ababa, and the Government of Ethiopia.]

APPENDIX III

The Colonial Secretary's Speech

The Text of the statement made by the Hon. Alan Lennox-Boyd, British Secretary of State for the Colonies in Hargeisa, British Somaliland, on February 9, 1959:

Last November [1958], the Governor announced certain constitutional advances and after the forthcoming elections the Protectorate will have for the first time a Legislative Council which includes elected members. Some of these elected members will be making themselves familiar with the work of some of the departments of Government.

When he made his statement, the Governor made it clear that further constitutional progress was being planned. In considering this matter, Her Majesty's Government have thought it right to pay special regard to the fact that the neighboring territory of Somalia is due to become independent when the trusteeship agreement between the United Nations and the Italian Government comes to an end in December 1960.[1] In these special circumstances Her Majesty's Government think that there is justification for proceeding with constitutional development in the Protectorate at a faster pace than they believe to be suitable or advantageous in more normal circumstances elsewhere. I can now say that it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government that by the end of 1960 there shall be an elected unofficial majority in the Legislative Council together with a ministerial system under which a number of unofficial members of the Legislative Council will become members of the Executive Council with executive responsibilities in Government.

These changes will raise important issues which will need to be considered. The Governor intends shortly to appoint a Commission to make recommendations to him on the number of representative members in the next Legislative Council, the method of their selection, constituencies and similar matters. This Commission will be asked to consider the place of the traditional tribal authorities in relation to the legislative and executive organs of Government and how these authorities may best be associated with the future working of the constitution.

The changes foreshadowed for 1960 will also involve a reorganization of the Government machine and some adjustment of the present budgetary arrangements. The Governor proposes to set in train the necessary examination of these problems at once so that in due time recommendations can be made to me about any changes which should be made in the present arrangements.

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[1] The speech was made before the passage of the United Nations resolution speeding up the date of independence for Somalia to July 1, 1960.

By the end of 1960 there will be thus an unofficial majority in the Legislative Council and Somalis with executive responsibility in the Government. Thereafter it is the intention of Her Majesty's Government to arrange such further constitutional steps as may be necessary to lead to early self-government.

Her Majesty's Government are aware of the desire expressed by many Somalis of the Protectorate that there should be a closer association between this territory and Somalia. If therefore, when Somalia becomes independent the Legislative Council of the Protectorate formally resolves that negotiations with the Government of Somalia be instituted to determine the terms and conditions on which a closer association of the two territories might be achieved, Her Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom would be ready to transmit this resolution to the Government of Somalia and enquire whether that Government would be willing to enter into negotiations. If so, Her Majesty's Government would arrange for negotiations of suitable nature to take place.

Whatever the eventual destiny of the Protectorate, Her Majesty's Government will continue to take an interest in the welfare of its inhabitants, and will in the light of the circumstances prevailing from time to time be prepared to give sympathetic consideration to the continuation of financial assistance within the limits of the amount of aid at present being provided to the Protectorate.

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